

Lieux de mémoire, Transculturality, and Identity in Contemporary Arab American Fiction: the Case of Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account* (2014)

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Abstract:

Diasporic narratives, as is the case with Arab American fiction, are more often than not characterized by nostalgia, return to origin, and self-fulfilment. Laila Lalami's The Moor's Account (2014) is, however, distinct for its being part and parcel of "petit récit", as Loytard already put it, or little narratives that involve lieux de mémoire. This article then endeavours to discuss the myriad representations of sites of memory, namely the symbolic and the historical dimensions the novel implies. By tracing the embodiments of realms of memory in Lalami's fictional memoir, the mobility of memory will be yet another point to be examined in a way to explicate how memory transcends geographical borders and undermines racial and ethnic differences. The aim is to account for the metaphoric travel of memory that is by far manifested in the plot. This paper seeks to argue for the fact that the novel is more like a carrier of memory and that memory is in essence the medium whereby culture moves beyond its local framework. It highlights the dynamics of memory and culture in that the narrative by itself exemplifies aspects of transcultural memory. With respect to the journey that the novel is entirely based on, the article aims to meticulously tackle how the issue of cultural identity has been played out that the non-linearity of identity, as being in a state of flux. In short, the dynamics of memory and identity on the ground of migration lie at centre of the discussion of the Moor's Account which falls within postcolonial and diasporic narratives.

Keywords: Lieux de mémoire; little narratives; transcultural memory; journey; dynamics of memory; cultural identity.

Introduction

As often as not, journeying the past is nothing but a mnemonic device that has vastly been used in diasporic fiction in particular. The quest for memory has been differently invested by Arab American authors, whose literary narrative by far described either as Anglophone or as hybrid¹, reflecting the heterogeneity of Arab community itself. Laila Lalami, whose novel is the core of this ongoing discussion, is difficult to pigeonhole or even classify into a well defined category by dint of her hybrid identity as well as of her rich postcolonial background. No wonder, the diversity of Arab American fiction mainly represents the diversity of its authors. In *Modern Arab American Fiction* (2011), Salaita points at the difficulty of categorizing Arab American writings. For him, the common thread lies in the nature of some topics around memories of homeland, “immigration, assimilation, racism, marginalization, and return to origin”², besides the legacy of post-coloniality. Arab American narrative is marked with its “*postcolonial, feminist, non-native, hybrid or Anglophone literary discourse*” (Sarnou2014, 67). This is because Arab American writers, much like Laila Lalami, are either immigrants or descendants of early Arab settlers. Their fiction is a blend of the country of origin and of the host country, that is, of two entirely different cultures. This narrative is arguably characterized by its hybridity³ and in-betweenness, for it grows between two cultures. This imagined place where Arab American narrative, as a whole, has been born conforms to Bhabha’s ‘*third space of enunciation*’ (1994, 37), created by diasporic voices that produce another culture. Diaspora, as termed by Clifford, refers to “*a history of dispersal, myths/ memories of the homeland*”⁴. The notion of memories of homeland in Clifford’s definition will be the point of departure to tackle sites of memory and the representation of transculturality and identity in the novel.

Laila Lalami’s *The Moor’s Account* (2014), which is grounded in a fictional memoir of a character muzzled by history, pictures a fictional voyage to sites of memory, to realms wherein memory and history contest one another. The present paper thereby uses the concept of *lieux de mémoire*, as theorized by Nora in his three volumes (1984-1992), in a way to discuss the material and non material sites that are embedded in the narrative. Investigating realms of memory in the novel is equivalent to exploring how these realms fundamentally and symbolically serve as a counter-discourse. The author’s journey to the past is yet another single fact that the past is always present in memory. That is, evoking the past in fiction is an issue of memory. In her book entitled *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A search for Home*, Agnew enunciates that the past is part and parcel of one’s very being and of one’s identity, as

¹ See Dalal, Sarnou. “Narratives of Arab Anglophone Women and the Articulation of a Major Discourse in a Minor Literature”. *International Studies Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal*, vol. 16, no. 1,2014, pp.66. DOI: 10.2478/ipcj-2014-0005. Sarnou’s article deals with the difficulty of categorizing Arab Anglophone women’s writing; it emphasizes the characteristics of the minority literature on the account of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s theory of minor literature.

² Steven, Salaita. *Modern Arab American Fiction*. New York, Syracuse University Press, 2011, p.7.

³ Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 132. Hybridity is one of the most key terms in post-colonial studies. Bhabha has developed it in his seminal work *The Location of Culture*, along with other mimicry, interstice and liminality; Bhabha employs these concepts to demonstrate that cultural production is always effective where it is always ambivalent.

⁴ James, Clifford. “Diasporas”. *Cultural Anthropology, Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future*, vol.9, no. Aug.1994, 305.

well. Memory establishes “a connection between our individual past and our collective past”⁵(Agnew2005, 03). The recurrent evocation of the past, by the narrator and/or the protagonist in the Moor’s Account, might be a proof that diasporic subjects resort to memory for the sake of cogitating, self-understanding, or seeking answers for the present issues. Memory, be it individual, collective or cultural, probably helps one reflect on matters and go back in time. It allows one to move back and forth, temporally and spatially.

Given the above, this paper is an attempt to read in-depth the many representations of place and memory with a special focus on their historical and symbolic dimensions. *A lieu de mémoire* is a key concept in the study of collective and/or cultural memory (Assmann1995)⁶. The Hungarian philosopher, Agnes Heller, avers that cultural memory is increasingly reflected in traces such as shared materiality that very likely encompasses “*signs, signals, symbols and allegories as storages of experience, memorabilia erected as reminders*”⁷. This implies that tackling realms of memory involves dealing with symbols that are part of cultural memory, as a form of collective memory. In addition to the interconnectedness of places of memory, *transcultural memory*⁸ has been adopted in this paper to evince how a set of memories transcend borders, be they geographical, linguistic, racial, spatial or even temporal. The point, in this, is to explicate that the novel has brought to light the mobility of memory, which is principally the movement of memory across cultures. This paper argues for transcultural memory that spotlights shared sites of memory that emerge from colonial nostalgia, travel and other forms of cultural interactions. In other words, memory in narrative deterritorializes imagined geographies and contributes to what Clifford calls “*travelling cultures*”⁹ (1992, 110). To display how diasporic memory contributes to diversity and cosmopolitanism, this article aims to reflect on migration as a state of negotiation of identity, with a view to discuss identity in a state of flux; that is, to corroborate the fact that cultural identity is no longer static but is often in a process of becoming.

I. Realms of Memory in *the Moor’s Account*: Symbolic and Historical dimensions

As Nora’s concept of a “*lieu de mémoire*” deals with collective memory manifested in material and non-material objects, cultural memory, for Agnes Heller, is about “*objectivations which store meanings in a concentrated manner, meanings shared by a group of people*” (Heller, 139). For Assmann, cultural memory is a part of collective memory “*in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a*

⁵ Vijay, Agnew. *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home*. Toronto, university of Toronto Press, 2005, p.3.

⁶See Jan, Assmman. “Communicative and Cultural Memory”. *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning, Berlin, New York 2008, pp. 109-118. doi.org/10.1515/9783110207262

⁷ Heller, Agnes. “Cultural Memory, Identity and Civil Society”. Retrieved from: library.fes.de pdf-files 2001-2 artheller) 2001, 139.

⁸ Astrid, Erll. “Traumatic pasts, Literary afterlives, and Transcultural Memory: new directions of literary and media memory studies”. *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, vol.3, no. 1, 2011. doi.org/10.3402/jac.v3i0.7186

⁹ See Clifford, James. “*Travelling Cultures*”. From *Cultural Studies edited with an Introduction by Lawrence Grossberg, Gary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler*, New York London, Routledge, 1992, p.110

collective, that is, cultural, identity"¹⁰. The difference that needs to be made between Halbwachs's collective memory and Assmann's understanding of memory is the notion of culture. Assmann connects it with memory. According to scholars of memory studies, cultural memory is exteriorized and stored away in symbols that could be transferred and transmitted from a generation to another. Marcel Proust, in this way, draws the attention of researchers to the fact that memory is anchored to objects or memorabilia which function as metonyms on the grounds that there is a "contract between a remembering mind and a reminding object". Cultural memory is related to things "such as dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes and other *lieux de mémoire*"¹¹(Assmann,111). A *lieu de mémoire* is not only an element of cultural memory but is a metonym referring to a thing. The metonyms or external objects, as Assmann already put it, carry a memory or arouse memories as they remind people of what occurred in the past. Memory serves as a connection to things or to places where something significant has ever happened. This conjunction of place and memory is central to the present discussion on realms of memory in *The Moor's Account* (2014). The importance is going to be placed upon historical events and places mentioned in the plot of the novel. Reading a "*lieux de mémoire*", as part and parcel of cultural memory, will spotlight the intersectionality of place, history and memory. A brief glance at the novel's synopsis is necessary to better analyze and interpret the symbolic and the historical meanings of *lieux de mémoire* with a special focus on memory, as a way de-canonizes official history and other forms of grand narratives.

Before delving into the analysis, it would be, however, consequential to start with an overview on the novel, considered as a masterpiece that feels like a true account on history. It is, indeed, Laila Lalmi's third novel that uncovers the story of a Moroccan slave called Mustapha al- Zammori, mentioned as Estebanico only in one line in Cabeza de Vaca's *La Relacion* (1542). In the novel, Esteban comes as Mustapha with his true name to speak of his story, from his own perspective, in order to tell readers about things believed to be dismissed from history. Mustapha recounts not only the details that were omitted by his three companions, the survivors of the most renowned expedition to *La Florida*, but he provides an alternate narrative to question the truthfulness of history. Suffice it to say, *The Moor's Account* (2014), from its outset, is very much involved in historiography and postcoloniality, seeing that the author has countered the canon or the mainstream historical narrative on the grounds of fiction. Another remark concerning the historiographical dimension of the novel is the connotation of its title. The word "Moor" in the title suggests that the major theme of the novel revolves around an era in history. The moor is an Arab or an Amazigh person that belongs to North Africa. Historically speaking, the term "Moors"¹² goes back to the Middle Ages when Christian Europeans used it to name those people, from the Maghreb, who used to live in Iberian Peninsula. Esteban's story is an account of a person whose severe and terrible circumstances led him to slavery. His account is parallel to that of a subaltern that contests history as a form of acknowledged knowledge. The emergence of such a peripheral voice is

¹⁰ Jan, Assmann. "Communicative and Cultural Memory". *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning, Berlin, New York 2008, pp. 110. doi.org/10.1515/9783110207262

¹¹ (*Ibid.*111)

¹² Lane-Poole, Stanley. *The Story of the Moors in Spain*. Black Classic Press, 1996.

meant to combat *grand narratives* (Lyotard, 1979)¹³ which totalize human experiences and universalize stories. With this in mind, *The Moor's Account* may seem like “petit récit” that challenges exclusion and racist ideologies. Mustapha, the protagonist and the narrator of his own story, is one of the unheard voices that reveal other possible versions of history. The entire account might be regarded as a discourse fitting the theory of writing back, a breakthrough in postcolonial studies. For Postcolonial theorists, to write back is to contest the canonical narrative, deconstruct and disclose the flaws of the already established norms of the colonizer. Lalami's novel falls clearly enough within the project of post-coloniality led by eminent theorists under the title of *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002).

The synopsis is crucial that it prepares the way for the discussion. To begin with, Estebanico tells a fabulous story of the most disastrous journey to the Americas. His account shows he has been the first African explorer among a crew of European conquistadores. The voyage, led by Pánfilo de Narváez the commander of the expedition, involved Castilians, Portuguese and slaves. The imagined character that appears in the story as Mustapha al-Zamori rather than Estebanico narrates the intricacies of this trip, from Seville to the New World, what is now the Gulf Coast of the United States. Mustapha brings forward his back story together with his Moroccan culture. He introduces himself as a freeman before being entrapped in slavery and moved from his native town. He sold himself to the Portuguese in a period of famine and drought, in which Moroccans suffered a lot. These terrible conditions, coupled with colonization and exploitation of the land, deepened the misery of Moroccans. The prolonged colonization of Azemmur was the primary reason that put an end to Mustapha's trade and cast him out as a slave.

His dream of becoming a merchant and not a notary, as his father wished, was met with misfortune. Unprecedented aridity and the death of his father amid the crisis urged Mustapha to do something. The burden was how to feed his starving siblings. He sacrificed his life for his family, and the result was selling himself. He was thereafter baptized and stripped of his identity. His first master, Rodriguez, resold him to Andrés Dorantes with whom Mustapha crossed the Atlantic Ocean. The expeditionary group landed in the Southeast of America was confronted with an utter mishap: several hurricanes, shipwrecks, diseases, starvation and skirmish with the natives. In Mustapha's account, these circumstances, among others, overmatched the Castilians' project of expansion. After a year, there were, however, only four survivors: Mustapha the narrator, Captain Dorantes, the treasurer Cabeza de Vaca, and a young nobleman Alonso Del Castillo. When they reached Spanish settlements in Mexico City, the Castilians were asked to provide testimonies for what had happened to their expedition. Mustapha was purposely excluded in the chronicle of Cabeza de Vaca titled as *La Relacion*¹⁴ (1542). This drew Mustapha into storytelling as a more powerful device than weapons. At the end, he expresses his last wish that his unborn child should know his father's story, perhaps as an explorer and not as a slave.

¹³ Despite its first use in the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of *grand narratives* has been developed by Jean François Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on knowledge* (1979), which prompts incredulity towards the generalized nature of metanarratives.

¹⁴ See Alvar Nunez Cabeza De Vaca(Author), Martin A. Favata(Translator), Jose B. Fernandez (Translator), *The Account: Alvar Nunze Cabeza de Vaca's Relacion*(Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage)2001.

There are correspondingly two vital remarks that draw a line between the previous readings on *the Moor's Account* and this one which intends to lay bare sites of memory, transculturality and identity. The first observation is that Mustapha's account implicitly pushes readers to look deep into history to discover its subjectivity and how historical knowledge is constructed; because it is history which disregards Mustapha's testimony. And this assumption definitely leads to another issue which is not the concern of this paper; it is historiography that is generally defined as the revision of history and as the investigation of "the constructivist nature of the historian's enterprise"¹⁵. Memory otherwise cracks history in the recounted stories in *The Moor's Account*. It is a cogent point in the novel that demonstrates the relativity of historical facts. The cultural historian, Peter Burk, in his essay on *social memory*, doubts the authenticity of both: memory and history. For him, "neither memories nor histories seem to be objective any longer"¹⁶ (Burk, 188). The second remark is the hub of this paper that tackles the issue of place and memory, together with the symbolic and the historical aspects of sites of memory in that the flashbacks are all about home and events that reverberate, in one way or another, with collective memory.

The material sites or places evoked in the plot cannot be read in a vacuum. When one remembers home, he recalls places, lived experiences and events. There is usually a mutual impact between place and human beings. In the novel, home represents a set of memories for the narrator and/ or the protagonist. In other words, it refers to a place of origin conjoined with personal or collective experiences. In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*¹⁷, Brah defines home, in relation to diaspora, as "a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination"¹⁸. It is an experience of locality that cannot be repeated exactly in the same way. People by nature are connected to the place of origin as a space in as much as it might be viewed as a memory. For Foucault, space has its own history and "it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time and space"¹⁹. In the novel, the place occupies an important part in the memory of the narrator that in some stories he describes his native town, namely "the Souq" or the weekly market, as a memory that operates as a non archival text of history. The striking point place, as a space and history are interdependent. The stories the protagonist recounts on his hometown and his country are full of description of space, experiences, and cultural practices of Moroccan people, in the region of Azemmur, that go back to that period in history. The memories of home are intermingled with history, with specific events. This once again implies that memory deals with space and time, that is, spatial and temporal.

The memories evoked by the narrator incorporate lieux de mémoire that are impossible to be dissociated neither from history nor from the symbols remembered object indicated implicitly. Nora proposes that no *lieu de mémoire* can ever be isolated from its symbols. As a result, the

¹⁵ White, Hayden. "Historiography and Historiophoty", *The American Historical Review*, Oxford Journals, vol. 93, no. 5, Oxford University Press, Dec. 1988, pp. 1193-1199.

¹⁶ See Peter Burk's article entitled "History as Social Memory" appeared in *Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, Daniel Levy (Oxford University Press, 2011), 188.

¹⁷ Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London, Routledge, 1996.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁹ Michel, Foucault. *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, translated by Jay Miskoweic, Architecture/ Movement/ Continuité, 1967.

emphasis *a lieu de mémoire* might be referred to a shared history or a sign rooted in collective memory.

In the light of the foregoing, some events in the novel could be per se regarded as realms of memory. Events are memories. The evocation of events, as shown in the plot, is neither haphazard nor hyperbolic, but seems to be symbolic. When Mustapha, the first person narrator and the protagonist of the novel, tells the story of his birth, he recalls an event that might be considered as the start of all other stories. A careful look at the lines Mustapha wrote about his birth, one would arrive at crucial points regarding the potential significations of the event of the fall of an empire and the rise of another. As he stated in his account: "*the story of my birth began long before I tumbled forth into this world. It began when one empire was falling and another was rising*"²⁰ (The Moor's Account 2014, 25). This event could be a turning point in the history of the Medieval Ages, for it signifies a new era of geographical discoveries. Mustaph's story of birth refers to an era in history that embodies a shift balance of power towards another side, or another empire. The allusion of the fall has a symbolic value at the collective level for Arabs and for Europeans, as well. It is perhaps a shared site of memory in both cultures in that it has still been a debatable issue among historians. It is an event that goes beyond its local or communal framework. Mustapha, as an omnipresent narrator, is aware of the significations of the event that it marks a dramatic upheaval, including the invasion of Morocco by the Portuguese and the spread of colonization in different parts in Africa. The fall has to do with the painful demise of the Arab civilization in Andalusia in 1492. The year indicates the surrender of Granada which was known as the Nasrid kingdom. The collapse of the last Islamic state in Andalusia equals the perishment of the Arab empire lasted about eight centuries. Many historians have reacted differently to this event. Some wrote about Muslim architecture and the glamour of the minarets in Al- Andalus that bear witness to Muslims' dominion over Spain. The expulsions of Muslims from Andalusia could be a lieu de mémoire, as it will be explained later (Tamara P. Fernandez 2021, 130; Amira K. Benison 2009)²¹. In his book *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* (1996), Kennedy discusses the political history of Muslim Spain and Portugal between 711 and 1492, with the intention of displaying the gradual deterioration and defeat of the Nasrid kingdom. The British medieval historian, Hugh Kennedy, attempts to cover the many details around the end of Muslims' rule. The surrender of Granada has still been an unforgettable event in the history of medieval Europe that it coincided with the launch of discoveries and the colonization of countries. The book offers details in reference to the existence of Muslims in Iberian Peninsula and to the end of their control over that part of Europe. He points to the largest campaign called '*Reconquista*'²² that engaged Christians in war against Muslims. The fall of Granada is the end of the biggest project of christianization headed by Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, who believed that the war between

²⁰ Laila , Lalami. *The Moor's Account*. New York, Penguin Random House, 2014, p. 15.

²¹ As the point is not to deepen the analysis and the interpretation of symbols in relation to lieux de mémoire, I have already tried to be aware not to indulge in history. So, two references for reading more about Islamic history are recommended. The first is Amira K. Bennison's *The Great Caliphs: The Golden Age Of the 'Abbasid Empire* (United States: Yale University Press, 2009).

²² The Reconquista of Spain is a well known concept among historians. The term that has been used in Fernandez article titled as *The Fall of Granada in Hall's and Holinshed's Chronicles: Genesis, Propaganda, and Reception* (2020), 130.

the Arabs and the Iberians had gone beyond a plain dispute over territories. In a book titled *Exile, Diplomacy and Texts*, Pérez Fernandez, in her article, clarifies that the conflict was neither regional nor territorial but a holy “war that transcended the boundaries of the European Kingdoms and that would be determinant in the final success of the Christian side in its clash against Islam”²³ (Fernandez2020, 131).

The narrator has notably included in his account a variety of “moments of history” or events that make up a *lieu de mémoire*. The Colonization of coastal Morocco, the battle of Azemmur, the commerce of slaves, and the arrival of Andalusians in Fez are aftermaths of that event of the collapse. Drought and famine in Morocco are also historical events rooted in the collective memory. It seems that each event has its own connotation. Each *lieu de mémoire* in the novel is denotative of an era of history. The narrator’s memory reflects the influence of collective memory. He is not recounting his personal story, but rather a collective memory. Almost all the events cannot be detached from collective memory. Mustapha’s account might be considered as a site of memory as it encompasses historical events resonating, in some way, with shared memory, in which *lieux de mémoire* exist. The narrator makes use of events that probably stand out as the aftermath of the shift in power, of the upheaval that led to the emergence of the European empire. The colonization of Melilla and Ceuta has been mentioned in the plot as unforgettable events for the narrator that records the invasion of the Portuguese and the colonization of coastal Morocco. Mustapha’s account bears witness to events really happened. His memoir gives details and provides a new version based on his own memory. It might be said that in Laila Lalami’s novel, there is an implicit battle between memory and history. In it, realms of memory, as shared sites, play a major role. Nora states that a *lieu de mémoire* may come out of “a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination”²⁴ (Nora1989, 19). Mustapha uses his own memory in order to move to something of interest, which is collective history. The line that is mentioned in his story could function as a reference point to those events, replete with symbols. The narrator hence drives readers to explore history from a new lens, which that of fiction.

In “*the Story of My Birth*”²⁵, there is a shift from personal to political, from individual to collective. The narrator’s story of birth shows this linkage clearly. The influence of collective memory on his story is substantially reflected in the connections he has made. It is manifested in his individual story and other political events of that era. In other stories the protagonist narrates, the collective and the personal seem to have been interwoven together. It appears that what is collective is tied to the social framework as a pivotal part in the process of recollection or almost in those kinds of narratives on memory. The latter, for many scholars, is a combination of the individual and of the collective; as Ricoeur put it “no one ever

²³ See Tamara Pérez-Fernández, “The Fall of Granada in Hall’s and Holinshed’s Chronicles: Genesis, Propaganda, and Reception”. *Exile, Diplomacy and Texts: Exchanges between Iberia and the British Isles, 1500–1767*, edited by Ana S. Hidalgo and Berta C. Echeverría, Brill, 2020, pp. 130-151. <https://brill.com/edcollbook-oa/title/54506?language=en>

²⁴ Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”. *Representations*, no. , 26, Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory*, Spring1989, p.19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

remembers alone"²⁶. What is striking herein is that employing collective memory in narrative implies utilizing things that have a value or a commemorative effect. The narrator's story might thus be the epitome of *a lieu de mémoire* that hints at a period in history.

It might be said that Laila Lalami's novel is imbued not only with history but with events and cities pertaining to memory. Places and events might be thought of as sites of memory that have their own history. They are stored in symbols as a result of their symbolic nature. When the narrator speaks of his hometown and how it fell into colonization, it seems, first of all, that the novel is a piece of history that portrays the modern age of colonialism and imperialism that began in the wake of the 15th century. From the narrator's perspective, one may get a full picture about the hometown of the protagonist that was colonized by the Portuguese. The account provides quite obvious hints on Moroccan policies at that time. The narrator's story, which is the novel, is historical par excellence. He tells us more about specific events that are retold differently in history books. The novel is filled with history, or rather, with moments of history, in addition to the place which might, by virtue of its history, be regarded as a memory.

"Azemmur fell.

Only then did my father's mood turn sombre. We should have known better than to rely on that devious sultan, the burtuqali, he said. Muhamad al-Burtuqali had earned his nickname because, as a child, he had been, held hostage for seven years by the Portuguese" (The Moor's Account, 57).

In this excerpt, it is obvious that the author, through the voice of the protagonist, tackles an era Moroccan history known by the deterioration of the political circumstances culminated in colonization. Azemmur is a place that bears witness to facts. It is by itself a memory. Within the same context, the narrator uses the year 928 of the Hegira in order to state that it marks the ending of a happy life: *"the end of our happiness came in the year 928 of the Hegira"*²⁷ (The Moor's Account 2014, 77). The Hegira year has an implication as much as the event of colonizing Moroccan territories does. David Scott argues that sites of memory are composed of *"objects, places or events in the real world...they are symbolic in that they represent or stand for meanings of cultural, social, political, or historical import"*²⁸. A *lieu de mémoire* could be referential because of its significations

Along with events that could be considered as sites of memory, the novel constitutes material places of memory. Fez is just another *lieu de mémoire* that has been briefly mentioned. It might be thought of as a place of memory, not only because of its implication but because of its cultural and historical dimension. It was a place of exiles who found refuge in it after they had been expelled from Andalusia. The narrator takes advantage of his position, as a chronicler to reveal some details about Muslims and Jews who escaped forced conversion. The narrator draws on the history of Fes and of its inhabitants. Yet, as usual, the narrator uses his own story, or rather, his own memory to discuss matters connected to collective memory. He writes:

²⁶ For further reading on memory and recollection, see Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 2004, p.122.

²⁷ Lalami, Laila. *The Moor's Account*. New York, Penguin Random House, 2014, p.77.

²⁸ Scott, David. "The Semiotics of the *Lieu de mémoire* : The Postage Stamp as a Site of Cultural Memory". *De Gruyter Mouton*, vol., 142, no., 1/4, 2006, p.188. doi.org/10.1515/semi.2002.069

“At that time, my father was a newly credential notary, with ambition to match his youth, but he found it nearly impossible to earn decent wages in Fes. You see, the city was overrun with refugees from Andalusia, Muslims and Jews who had fled the forced conversions. Among these exiles were many famous jurists and experienced notaries. So when news reached my father that the town of Melilla- less than three days away by horse- had been fallen to the crown of Castile, his first thought was that there would be even more refugees in the city and even less work”(The Moor’s Account ,25).

Fez has emerged in the narrative as a place of refugees Muslims and Jews, who escaped Christianization. Mustapha, as a voice that counters the official version of history, sketches out the situation like a chronicler. The account provided is however more than a piece of fictionalized memoir that echoes with history or serves as another version of it, albeit the lack of legitimacy. It is above all a literary work of fiction. The author generally displays the story of dispersion of Andalusians, namely Muslims and Jews, and throws light on the military might and brutality of the colonizer. The novel unmask a period of trauma and of forced migration. The excerpt above exposes a bundle of facts of genocide, deportation, and human sufferings. It also refers to different professions of the early refugees in fez such as Jurists, notaries and other careers the city has ever since been famous for. All this makes the city *a lieu de mémoire*, that is, a connotation of a place of memory. The city is inscribed in history that everything in it, including its inhabitants, has a story rooted in the memory of the people, in the collective memory as a place of diversity and difference.

More importantly, each place in the novel could be a mirror image of memory. While reading stories in the novel, place, as a space, plays a role in the narrative. The narrator’s account, as a whole, gives evidence of the fact that the place and all its connotations is deeply ingrained in memory and is reflected in the retold stories. The narrative is therefore a vehicle of memory whereby realms of memory come into being. The narrativization of memory is not merely about telling individual stories but is a way of enlivening those sites that cannot be read, except in their historical framework. Physical places of memory that form the plot of *The Moor’s Account*(2014) could probably serve as a counter discourse that intends to combat the legitimacy of history, insofar as these sites stand out as testimonies. La Giralda is a place of memory. It is a minaret of the Great Mosque in Seville and is a replica for Koutobiyia in Marrakesh. It testifies to the age of development and advancement of the Islamic civilization. Hayden White’s conception on narrative is convenient to the assumption of this article that lieux de mémoire are fraught with implications and symbols. Places and events have been employed because each lieu or event has a symbolic indication. Historical fiction is a part of historical narrative. In this, Hayden White argues that historical narrative pertains to “the category of symbolic discourse”²⁹. Given that the narrator of *The Moor’s Account* plays the role of a chronicler, the plot might be an extension of a historical narrative, with *lieux de memoir*, including places and events that have many connotations.

No place that the narrator has otherwise pointed out in his memoir might be coincidental. Some places blended into the narrative are reminiscent of an Islamic culture. Every place cannot be read outside its cultural references. La Giralda and the Kutubiyia are associated with culture as well with society. Mustapha remembers his first visit to La Giralda as a slave.

²⁹ White, Hayden. “The Questions of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory”, Vol. 23, No. 1, Wesleyan University: Wiley Blackwell, 1984, 28. History and Theory, Vo

When he saw it, the spirit of the place triggered in him memories of homeland. He recalls other minarets at home like the Kutubiya as he stated in his story. *La Giralda* is emblematic of culture, of a society. As a place, it consists of a memory. It refers to the Islamic society that used to be in Andalusia and has also to do with that era of history. *La Giralda* stands out as memorabilia or as “Mnemosyne”, according to Assmann’s theory of cultural memory. For Assmann, “Things do not only “have” a memory of their own, but they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories”. The relation between place and memories is manifested in a range of associations that the narrator makes with it when he visited La Giralda.

At a bend in the road I caught the first glimpse of an imposing tower, which looked very much like the minarets at home. What is the name of that tower? I asked the man with the red kerchief. La Giralda, he said without turning. I had heard of La Giralda years earlier- it had been built by the Almohad sultans as a replica of the Kutubiya in Marrakesh-and I had even fantasized of seeing it someday, but never under these circumstances”(108).

It might be said that the excerpt the story reveals part of the Moorish legacy. He speaks of those sites that are related to collective and cultural memory. Mustapha, whose voice crossed with that of the author, uncovers places that become a part of a forgotten past. The minaret is an objectivation of memory. It corroborates the past of Seville. It testifies to the prosperity and the architecture of Almohads’ Empire. The minaret, as a *lieu de mémoire*, is but a symbol of Muslim civilization. The edifice might be a cultural model of excellence and development of al-Andalus ruled by Muslims in that era of medieval ages. *La Giralda* is a cultural palimpsest that go back to the history of Andalusia, to the era of Aby Ya’qub Yusuf al-Mansur who gave orders of building the minaret in 1184(Mariam Rosser-Owen 2014) . With this said, Owen explains that the art of medieval Morocco is similar to that of Islamic Iberia, as the highest cultural model in the region. Architecture related to Almoravids and Almohads control represents almost all the aspects of the Islamic Iberian model. Owen, like many art historians, states that many studies about “Andalusi works of art were part of a conscious appropriation of styles... to the legitimacy of their rule”³⁰ (Rosser –Owen 2014, 152). Finally, tracing the sites of memory is often connected not only to national identity but to the power of the place as well as to its history that is hard to be erased.

Along the same line, realms of memory lie in its unbounded dimensions and its metaphoric meanings. The places evoked in the narrative are compatible with the historical era they refer to as well as with other indications. The city of Azemmur and the region of Dukkala are places that the narrator recalls in his stories. The evoked places are connected with the Portuguese dominion in the 15th century. As pointed out by the narrator: “*The city of Azemmur had been under vassalage to Manule the Fortunate for a few years already*”(The Moor’s Account 2014, 27). When the narrator remembers his childhood, he presents an account about history of Azemmur. The place is fundamental to memory because it helps evocation. Sometimes, the place might be memory. The place, as Nora maintained, is “*where*

30 Rosser,Own Meriam. Andalusí *Spolia* in Medieval Morocco: “Architectural Politics, Political Architecture. *Medieval Encounters*, vol., 20, 2014, pp. 152-198. Brill.com

*memory crystallizes and secrets itself*³¹. In the novel, the place and what it symbolizes etched in the memory of the narrator. Each place has its own memories. Mustapha remembers well different places of his hometown such “*m’sid*” and “*Souq*” and other parts, including the colour of the doors of his hometown. The place, as a lieu de memoir, has to do with things inscribed in memory, with those connections people make with the remembered object. Because of these connections the object or the remembered place could be symbolic. In his study of the postage stamp as a site of cultural memory, David Scott relies on the semiotic approach, particularly on Pierce’s theory of semiotics. He clearly states that the symbolic dimensions of realms of memory reside in the “*physical or geographical locations*”³²(Scott2002, 107).

II. *Transcultural Memory: the Mobility of Lieux de Mémoire*

As already shown, “*lieux de mémoire*” involve an array of symbolic and historical meanings. The emphasis is going to be placed upon the travel of memory, manifested in literary narratives such as short stories, novels, poems and other creative works that go beyond their local frameworks. In this vein, Nora’s concept of *a lieu de mémoire* is no longer confined to the national context it hails from. In the Moor’s Account, places and events that are considered as aspects of lieux de mémoire transcend the imagined borders of the nation. A site of memory in narrative becomes more dynamic that its mobility and continuity associates with Walter Benjamin’s concept of “*afterlife*”³³. In other words, the survival of a site of memory in a piece of fiction that the potential of the narrative to unfold elsewhere. The metaphoric movement of memory across geographical territories is very much represented in literary narratives of diaspora that seem like an example of the fiction of migration. A particular site of memory, be it an event or a place imbued with symbols, is in transit as a result of immigration, globalization, and the emergence of subcultures in diaspora. Laila Lalami’s *The Moor’s Account* probably illuminates the travel of memory. The novel shows how memory carries a culture to elsewhere. The plot of the novel depends much on the shared past, that is, on the collective memory that cannot be detached from culture. Following Assmann, Collective memory is made up of cultural elements which can be “*exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms, that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent*” (J. Assmann2008, 111). Laila lalami’s novel mirrors the figurative transfer of sites of memory reflected in places, events, traumas and all that bulk of narrative on homeland. In this way, it might be assumed that it is true that memory deterritorializes cultural terrains and geographical borders and contributes to an interaction between individuals at the global level. This mobility of memory across imagined geographies is defined as being a transcultural process. The latter might be an evidence on the fact that memory can be shared and discussed among people from different backgrounds.

³¹ Nora, Pierre. “*Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*”. *Representations*, no. 26, Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory*, Spring1989, p.7.

³²Scott, David. “The Semiotics of the Lieu de mémoire : The Postage Stamp as a Site of Cultural Memory”. *De Gruyter Mouton*, vol., 142, no., 1/4, 2006, p.107. doi.org/10.1515/semi.2002.069

³³ Disler, Caroline. “Benjamin’s “Afterlife”: A Productive (?) Mistranslation In Memoriam Daniel Simeoni”. *Traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, vol., 24, no., 1, 2011, pp.9_15.

As the narrator plays the role of a culture bearer, whose individual memories represent a profusion of cultural practices, it might be said that the novel embodies the idea of “travelling memory”³⁴. The market Mustapha recalls presents a range of daily activities that go back to medieval Morocco and that reveal a part of Moroccan culture. Mustapha’s memoir brings to light the popular market or “Souq” which appears as a folkloric place. This also pictures not the travel of memory but that of culture as Clifford already argued³⁵.

“ my sense of injustice was especially strong on Tuesday, which was market day, because the other boys were able to run around, exploring stalls, eating sweetmeats, watching a dancer or a snake charmer, or otherwise getting into mischief, while I had to sit in a dark musty classroom with my fiqih. Before long, I began to skip school in order to indulge in my favourite pastime – visiting the Souq. There, I watched fortune –tellers, faith healers, herbalists, apothecaries, and beggars. They promised a healthy child, a painless life, a pliant husband, a dutiful wife, or a path to heaven, perhaps different versions of the same things, but the stories they told or foretold comforted people, inspired them, allowed them to imagine a future they had denied themselves”³⁶.

As a displaced or as a forced migrant subjected to severe circumstance, Mustapha’s account is nostalgic and is full of memories of his hometown. He remembers details of things that used to take place in *Souq*. It is the place he had loved much it as a child and recalled it frequently as a slave. Seen from this perspective, Mustapha recounted his story when he had been a way of home. The condition of displacement drives him to evoke his old memories. The excerpt therefore shows the recurrent evocation of home. He remembers a range of scenes of his pastime in the weekly market. The *Souq* seems like a portrait of a Moroccan life back to the late of the 15th century. It spotlights some of the activities that have existed until today. The popular market or *Souq* is by itself a memory in which there is culture. That is, memory carries a culture embedded in the retold stories. The narrator, as a diasporic subject, returns to the past. Not only does he recall memories, but also every single thing might represent a memory. Stuart Hall emphasises the fact that the relation between a diasporic subject and the past is based the return. The latter, for him, “*is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth*” (Hall1996, 226). There is then a relation to the past. Hall avows that the relation to the past is “*always already after the break*”. The point is that remembering the past implies evoking places and culture. As a matter of fact, remembering might be equal to transmitting a piece of culture. The weekly market is a place embedded in narrative as a memory transcending its national boundaries. The activities taking place in *Souq* are just a facet of collective memory in which culture cannot be dismantled. The narrator describes jobs in the market, such as snake charmer, faith healer, apothecaries, and beggars. The kinds of jobs evoked in the novel are portrayal of a culture. In a sense, the souq is a place of memory

³⁴ Erll, Astrid. “Travelling Memory”. *Parallax*, Vol.,17, no., 4, 2011, pp.4-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605570>

³⁵ Clifford, James. “Travelling Cultures “. *From: Cultural Studies Edited with an Introduction by Lawrence Grossberg, Gary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler. New York London: Routledge, 1992.*

³⁶ Laila Lalami, *The Moor’s Account*(New York, Penguin Random House, 2014),33.

that is reflective of a culture, of a society. Narrativizing memory is then twofold. It functions as a sort of commemoration and as a counter argument on the locatedness of realms of memory.

The excerpt above showcases sites of memory stored in narrative. When Remembering and narrating a body of “*lieux*” where memory is anchored, these sites go beyond their local territories; memories surpass imagined borders. In the case of diaspora, recalling home away from home is nothing but an aspect of ‘trans’ remembering, replica of ‘travelling memory’. The narrator recalls his hometown and some of the practices of daily life of his own society. His account, which is purely a work of memory, contains a culture that is shared outside its local framework. A piece narrative, as is the case with *The Moor’s Account*, looks like a carrier of culture. The novel, which is composed of stories and a set of remembrances, revolves around a journey; it transports readers to live in an era at the very end of the 15th century. It has been shown that remembrance, which put stories into effect, is fluid and mobile. The narrator, as an African slave, carries his memories in exile. These memories shaped and transformed “en route” are the core of the account and represent a society. Regarding the mobility of memories, Astrid Erll states that “*all memories produced in culture are transcultural*”. The act of remembering is a process that is already unbound, or out of bound. It provides a clear enough picture on culture of that period and portrays how lieux de mémoire, imbedded in narrative could circulate and move across borders. This simply reveals the dynamics of *sites of memory* that come into play in fiction. Jenny Wüstenberg’s assumption of “memory brokers” is useful that authors, researchers, and scholars contribute to the connection of “*local narrative, concepts, sites, and people with those elsewhere*”³⁷. He goes far to argue that reading memorial sites is part of the transnationalization of memory.

With this in mind, one may venture to say that *The Moor’s account* showcases the mobility of memory sites. Fiction is a carrier of memory. As contended by Erll, “*the medium is the memory*” (Erll2011, 115). It asserts the transculturality of memory. In relation to this perspective, Ann Rigney calls the mobility of memory “the dynamics of remembrance”. She proposes that realms of memory are “constantly being reinvested with new meaning” (2008, 346). The novel uncovers how memories in bulk transcend lines of demarcation and deterritorialize cultural spheres other than those of the indigenous culture. As people migrate from one place to another, an amount of culture and memories are carried elsewhere. This mobility challenges the fixity of collective memory and of identity that used to be confined to place. In sum, the idea that memory transcends territories could be similar to travelling back to the past and moving forward the present.

Remembrance is intertwined with places and ancient jobs in the novel. The author, working behind the scenes, intends to use words that represent memory like “*msid*”, which could be translated as a *Qur’anic school* and “*fiqh*” as a scholar. These words are not translated in English, but are kept in their original language. Using words of the mother tongue is one way that reflects their power at the collective level, as they embody a memory. The word ‘*msid*’ is a place for learning and rehearsing Qu’ran; it occupies a position in memory. The memories of the narrator transfer a culture to a global sphere. Fiction, in this way, is a medium that paves the ground for transculturality. The novel might be the epitome

³⁷ Jenny, Wüstenberg. “Locating Transnational Memory, International Journal of Politics”. *Culture, and Society*, 2019, p,380.

of transcultural memory, a perspective that throws more light on how “*certain ways of looking and recalling can actually become shared by groups at different locations across the world*”³⁸

III. Dialogic Identity and Diversity in The Moor’s Account

“*I wondered why God created so many varieties of faiths in the world if He intended all of us to worship him in the same fashion*”³⁹ (The Moor’s Account 2014, 275).

Albeit his silence and invisibility within the group of explorers, Estebanico appears in the story not as a slave but as a sage man with incomparable power of storytelling and deep contemplation. His monologues very much display the power behind his silence. He has been depicted by his long meditations on human abuse: colonizing countries, enslaving people, raping women such as Rummatullah and other Native American women. Mustapha questions the objective behind the variety of faiths in the world. His reflection on the issue of variety of faiths represents his curiosity for discovery, for truths. His questioning unmask the issue of cultural identity, as a matter of controversy.

Indeed, the interest in styles of worship might be a state of contemplation on the acquired culture that is mostly part of oneself. Mustapha has raised the question of beliefs taken for granted and become an element of identity. Mustapha’s questioning is cultural as it deals with things that turn out to be a part of the self. His flashbacks are essentially meditations on things that already happened. He even confesses that his account is completely grounded in memory: “*I have had to rely entirely on memory*” (The Moor’s Account 2014, 05). It is noteworthy that the narrator’s question is a thoughtful monologue. It appears as if the author, who works behind his first narrator, called the attention to the influence of cultural exchange in the new setting. Interrogating cultural identity comes as a result of interaction of the new environment. The narrator is presented as a person who talks to himself. It is the character that has been pictured as being preoccupied with self-dialogue, memories and the return to the homeland. His memories on bandage and displacement are contemplative. His words seem like Hamlet’s soliloquies. He soliloquizes in a way to find an answer or to know the significance behind a range of beliefs. His memories are full of repentance and are about home. There is therefore a connection between being away of home and the state of reflection. The narrator’s wish to know why different religions exist in the world might be an outcome of movement, migration, diaspora and cultural encounters, which discloses the dynamics of cultural interaction among people. The narrator, in his account, points at this cultural contact between him and the Castilians, and between him and the Native Americans. The influence of these encounters led him to see things differently. As mentioned in the novel: “*little by little, the land of the Indians, which I had viewed first as a place of fantasy and later as a temporary destination, became more real to me, and I began to take a greater notice of its beauty*” (The Moor’s Account 2014, 213). It is due to “*the contact zone*”⁴⁰, the protagonist, Estebanico, has begun wondering the diversity of religions and the purpose of variety. Mobility may be a key factor in rethinking identities. The novel pictures a situation that is closer to reality.

³⁸ Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, Vol. 19 in the series *Media and Cultural Memory / Medien und kulturelle Erinnerung*, edited by Astrid Erll · Ansgar Nünning, De Gruyter, 2014, p.4.

³⁹ Laila Lalami, *The Moor’s Account*. New York, Penguin Random House, 2014, p.275.

⁴⁰ Mary Louis Pratt. *The Arts of the Contact Zone*, USA, Modern Language Association, 1991.

It unearths the fact that displacement and contact with other cultures affect the protagonist, as a migrant.

As argued earlier, doubting the objective behind different religions embodies the interrogation of cultural identity. The question the narrator raised obviously targets religion, being cultural inheritance and something people acquire through interaction. Stuart Hall speaks of two different positions by which one can come up with an understanding for cultural identity. The first view regards it as a shared history and common cultural codes of a community that makes people a sort of collective, of “*one true self*” (Hall 1990, 223). Cultural identity, in this way, might be understood as a fixed, stable, and unchanging entity; whereas the second conception posits the metamorphic and unsettled characteristics of identity, constitutive of varied points of similarity and differences, of being and becoming. Hall considers cultural identities as being “*subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power*”⁴¹. One may go further to say that religion is consisted in a cultural system of symbols. In his classical essay entitled “Religion as a Cultural System”⁴², Clifford Geertz states that religion is a subset of culture which may undergo changes like anything else cultural. Inna Edara writes that “religious culture is a subset of culture at large”⁴³, inas much as beliefs mirror the kind of culture people get. In the case of the protagonist, his journey to America helps him encounter different people, namely Christian Europeans and Native Americans, along with coming across a plenty of beliefs while wandering the South region of America. Being an itinerant, he was able to look diverse religious faiths that are a part of one’s cultural identity. Mustapha’s attempt, to understand why there all these ways of worshipping and there is not a single religion for all human beings.

According to post-modern and post-colonial theorists, cultural identity is no longer static or linear as a result of migration, globalization and the permanent changes the world is witnessing. These factors, among others, increase human interaction and contest the cultural identity as stasis. From a postcolonial lens, Bhabha’s notion of hybridity is an added value for it challenges the stability of cultural identity. Hybridity is meant to explain the construction of cultural identity by virtue of the contact between the colonizer and the colonized. For Bhabha, the concept signifies multiplicity and plurality of identity. The significance of Bhabha’s view resides in denying any reductionist conception towards identity. As mentioned above, particularly concerning the end of Estebanico’s journey, there is a change in the way he comes to perceive differences.

If one compares the beginning of Mustapha’s account with its ending, it might be obvious to note the shift in his attitude. This change manifests itself in the way the narrator comes to see the world and react to it. As he admits: “*this thought had never occurred to me when I was a young boy memorizing the Holy Qur’an, but as I spent time with the Indians I came to see how limiting the notion of one true faith really was*”⁴⁴. The point is not merely the monologue but is the dialogue in which cultural identity comes into play. The narrator’s memories are dialogic in that

⁴¹ Hall’s theorization of cultural identity is central to discussing how cultural identity is negotiable and is thus influenced by other cultures; it is continuously subject to transformation. See Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 225.

⁴² Geertz, Clifford. “Religion as a cultural system”, In: *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*, Geertz, Clifford, Fontana Press, 1993. pp.87-125

⁴³ Edara, Inna. “Religion: A Subset of Culture and an Expression of Spirituality”. *Scientific Research: An Academic Publisher, Advances in Anthropology*, vol., 7, no., 4, Nov 2017. DOI: 10.4236/aa.2017.74015

⁴⁴ Lalami, Laila. *The Moor’s Account*. New York, Penguin Random House, 2014, p. 276.

there is a negotiation that the narrator recalls his childhood and compares what he has already learned as a child with the present. The narrator talks to himself in a way to understand how one true faith is limited. It is through dialogue that he gets to discuss truths, religions and diversity, with the aim of understanding the differences among humans. He negotiates his own cultural beliefs in relation to those which exist in the New World. In Bakhtin's terms, the self is dialogic as it could be understood as a relation. Mustapha's monologue is then a self dialogue that intends to come to terms with others things, that is, to understand the self in relation to "the other". In his book on Bakhtin's Dialogism, Michael Holquist enunciates:

It cannot be stressed enough that for him "self" is dialogic, a relation. And because it is so fundamental a relation, dialogue can help us understand how other relationships work, even (or especially) those that preoccupy the sometimes stern, sometimes playful new Stoics who most dwell on the death of the subject: relationships such as signifier/ signified, text/ context, system/history, rhetoric/language, and speaking/ writing. We shall explore some of these further in later chapters not as binary oppositions, but as asymmetric dualisms. But we must begin by recognizing that for Bakhtin the key to understanding all such artificially isolated dualisms is the dialogue between self and other⁴⁵.

Crucially, the conclusions the narrator has drawn are monologic and represent self-consciousness. The monologue is in essence an internal dialogue that underlies self interrogation. He interrogates religions, as components of cultural identities. Mustapha's reflection could basically be contemplation around the principle of diversity. Perhaps, the narrator wants his readers to believe that each religion fits a particular human race, Monologue is a self dialogue on identity and demonstrates the fact that identity is dialogic. With this, it seems that Lalami's novel, through the voice of the narrator/protagonist, establishes a critical dialogue on religious beliefs as a subset of culture. The narrator negotiates his cultural identity as he has been influenced by the other. For Hall, identities are "never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions"⁴⁶. For him, identity is often shaped through continuous dialogues with the other, that is, with cultural identities. The narrator shows that cultural identity is negotiable, changeable and not fixed. By virtue of the non-fixity nature of cultural identity, the author, as a diasporic subject, has implicitly pointed at the importance of the interaction among human beings which proves the fact that identity is an ongoing process of deconstructing and reconstructing. Identity is thus a process of becoming.

Conclusion

On the account of what has been said above, Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account* is not only a discourse of a subaltern that intends to contest the mainstream historical narrative but is a journey to the past, to *lieux de mémoire* mingled with meditations on cultural identity. The point of departure in this article has been to investigate the symbolic and the historical dimensions of realms of memory in the novel. The analysis has thereby been directed towards the narrator's individual memory which basically reflects the collective memory. It is the argument that prepares the way for discussing the symbolic aspect of *lieux de mémoire*, on the basis of Pierre Nora's theorization. As already debated, when it comes to read a site of memory in narrative, the notion

⁴⁵ Holquist, Michael. *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*. 2nd ed., London and New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 18.

⁴⁶ Hall, Stuart and Paul Du Gay. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London, Sage Publications, 1996, p. 4.

involves specific historical events and places as memory. The emphasis has been placed upon the narrator's memories that involve events and places as part and parcel of memory. He evokes his homeland in relation to events such as colonization and famine. Not only does the protagonist remember his homeland but there is also a revocation of some historical events connected, in one way or another, to material places of memory. While analysing, there have examples mentioned in the novel that might be realms of memory because of its signification at the collective level. That is, the implications of that event in the collective memory. The protagonist uses his memories that basically present a collective history. The first objective of using the concept of realms of memory, in this vein, is to show that places revoked in narrative are identical with the historical eras they refer to and with other symbols associated with them. The city of Azemmur and the region of Dukkala are places the narrator recalls in his stories. They are evoked in connection with the Portuguese dominion in the 15th century. The place is fundamental to memory because of its evocative and commemorative power. Nora argues that the place is "*where memory crystallizes and secrets itself*". This connection is more telling about place, as a space, and memory. The second argument in this article has been the dynamics of memory in a way to display that memory goes beyond its local and national framework. I have attempted to demonstrate the fact that *lieu de mémoire* is similar to Walter Benjamin's "*afterlife*" in terms of its mobility and continuity of the site of memory in narrative. This simply means that *lieux de memoir* in fiction truly transcend the national borders as they become boundless and transcultural. Many examples in *The Moor's Account* illuminate the travel of culture and the travel of memory as well. The journey of the narrator from his homeland and his return back to it imaginatively is typical of the travel of memory and of culture. By discussing cultural identity in the novel, Mustapha's monologues have been read in terms of reflecting on the self, which is a reflection on identity. The protagonist calls into question the existence of different faiths in the world. His queries centre on the purpose behind the variety of faiths as he wonders why there is not only one way of worshipping God. It has therefore been noted that religious beliefs are cultural and that anything cultural is subjected to changes and alterations. It has been delineated that identity is not fixed and not stable any more, especially in the context of diaspora wherein cultural identities coexist and tolerate differences.

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